

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D.C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

11 May 1984

Chad: Habre's Fragile Position

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Summary

With the de facto partition of Chad along the 16th parallel a balance of power has emerged that provides a measure of stability to Chad. President Hissein Habre is using the lull to grapple with serious foreign and domestic problems stemming from his country's 19-year civil war. He is making tenuous progress in some areas.

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The prospects for continued stability will depend on French willingness to remain in Chad as long as Libyan leader Qadhafi is determined to undercut Habre and install a friendly regime in N'Djamena. The status quo could be shattered in a number of ways. This could include stepped up Libyan terrorism sufficient to cause France to reconsider its activist role in Chad, Habre's death or assassination, or the emergence of an unforeseen compromise candidate to lead Chad that might tempt Paris to seek a facing-saving diplomatic settlement with Libya at Habre's expense.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] West Africa Branch, Africa Division, Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It has been coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. Questions and comments are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Africa Division, [redacted]

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Introduction

President Habre is trying to put to good use the respite from major fighting that has resulted from French military intervention in the north and government-initiated reconciliation agreements with several dissident groups in the south. In addition to the threat of militarily superior Libyan and Chadian dissident forces poised in occupied northern Chad, Habre faces the daunting task of reconciling Chad's 200 ethnic groups, integrating factional forces into a national army, and restoring the war-torn economy. He continues to seek the basis for agreement with Chadian dissident groups located outside the country, while trying to strengthen ties with neighboring states to bolster the government's legitimacy and security. Although Habre is making some tenuous progress, we believe renewed fighting in the north or serious outbreaks of dissidence in the south and east would divert attention from long overdue reconciliation and reconstruction. [redacted]

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Libya's Strategy

Qadhafi appears to be using a multipronged strategy to subvert Habre's government and expand Libyan control. The strategy is a mix of terrorism against Habre's supporters, sponsorship of Chadian dissident activity, diplomatic maneuvering against Habre, consolidation of Libyan military power in northern Chad, and, perhaps, bilateral negotiations with France. So far, Qadhafi has stopped short of direct military confrontation with the French, probably for fear of the military and political consequences. [redacted]

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Qadhafi is working to raise the cost to France and Zaire for their support of Habre. US Embassy officials suspect Libya sponsored both the explosion last March that destroyed a French commercial airliner on the ground in N'Djamena and the subsequent bombing of radio and telephone facilities in Kinshasa. Nine French soldiers died in Chad in April in the explosion of a booby-trapped vehicle. [redacted]

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Tripoli continues to broaden its efforts to subvert Habre's regime by encouraging dissident activity in southern and eastern Chad. US Embassy reporting over the last several months indicates that attempts by Libyan-backed rebels to infiltrate arms, ammunition, and medical supplies to dissidents in these regions has increased. [redacted]

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Libyan-supported rebel leaders are trying with Libyan money to win back the allegiance of some dissidents who have rallied to the government. [redacted]

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Libyan bribes lured some 100 ralliers to rejoin the rebels last February. We believe the Libyans may also urge more small-scale rebel attacks against government forces just south of the 16th parallel to harass Habre. Libyan probably would avoid direct

involvement in such operations although Tripoli might provide a small advisory presence. [redacted]

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Libya is lobbying for support of the rebels internationally and within the OAU, while attempting to undermine Habre's position as the legitimate leader of Chad. [redacted]

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[redacted] In our judgment, Qadhafi almost certainly will apply his leverage over dissident leaders to block a settlement if the rebels show signs in any future talks of making concessions at the expense of Libyan interests. [redacted]

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Libya almost certainly calculates that a failure by Habre over time to generate broader support for a diplomatic settlement will weaken French patience and could persuade Paris to search for an alternative leader. [redacted]

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[redacted] We believe Libya also may attempt to cut a separate bilateral deal with the French that at a minimum would lay the groundwork for the withdrawal of French troops and provide for Habre's replacement. [redacted]

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Although the French are becoming increasingly impatient with the lack of progress in their talks with Tripoli, in our view they still prefer a continuation of negotiations to a renewal of largescale fighting or withdrawing without a favorable agreement. Both the French and the Libyans have stated publicly that they want a mutual withdrawal of their forces, but there has been no progress toward an agreement on the modalities. French officials have told the US Embassy in Paris that they have rejected Qadhafi's pre-conditions, which include a Mitterrand-Qadhafi meeting, a resumption of French arms sales, and the "liquidation" of Habre. [redacted]

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[redacted] some 5,500 Libyan troops are continuing to consolidate their hold on northern Chad. Tripoli has taken steps to improve its logistic and administrative system in the occupied area. [redacted]

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[redacted] airfields have been upgraded at Faya Largeau, Ounianga Kebir and, most recently, Fada. New airstrips have been constructed at Ogoui, Gourou and Fada. [redacted]

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Tripoli's heavy-handed control in the north has led to occasional outbreaks of anti-Libyan unrest in recent months by both followers of dissident leader Goukouni and civilians. Chadian government officials claim that desertions and defections by Chadian dissidents are slowly increasing. In our judgment, this unrest poses no threat to Libya's hold, but it does underscore the difficulty Tripoli faces in stamping out nationalist sentiment in the occupied north. [redacted]

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France's Key Role

As long as Libyan forces occupy northern Chad, the Habre regime's survival will depend on the continued military backing of France. Paris deployed some 3,000 French troops and aircraft in support of Habre last August after it became clear that his army was no match against a determined southward advance by Libyan and dissident forces. Although France is reluctant to become directly involved in combatting Libyan-backed dissidence in southern and eastern Chad, according to US Embassy reporting, Paris recently indicated that it would step up intelligence and logistic support to the Chadian army to slow infiltration of Libyan materiel. Moreover, France--Chad's largest aid donor--provided a \$50 million credit for military equipment and advisory services in 1983 and over \$50 million in operating expenses for 1984. [redacted]

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Habre also relies on vital French economic assistance to keep his government operating and to fund reconstruction efforts. According to the US Embassy, France channeled about \$30 million in economic aid to N'Djamena in 1983, of which \$9 million was in direct budgetary support and \$6 million in defrayed operating expenses for the central government. The remaining \$15 million paid for the salaries of civil servants and fuel oil. About 40 French advisers helped administer developmental aid last year that totaled \$4 million for agricultural and transportation projects, some \$4 million in health aid, \$1.8 million in food aid, and \$1.3 million in scholarships. [redacted]

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Although Habre ultimately looks to France to deter Libyan encroachment and to support his government, US Embassy reporting indicates that he continues to doubt the strength of French commitment to his rule. Habre worries that Paris may withdraw its support for his regime if the Mitterrand government concludes that an alternative leader would facilitate a settlement with Tripoli. [redacted]

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Moreover, some Chadian officials view Paris' reluctance to take the war to the Libyans, or to provide Habre with the offensive weaponry to do so, as a de facto acceptance of Libya's claim to the north. [redacted]

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Paris is unlikely, however, to endanger its considerable strategic and economic interests in Africa by pulling out of Chad while Qadhafi's

troops are still occupying the northern half of the country. Habre's suspicions are correct to the extent that Paris's primary concern is containing the Libyans, and not keeping Habre in power. As long as Habre can assist them toward this goal and no alternative leadership can be identified, the French will suppress their doubts about Habre and work with him. A precipitous pull-out from Chad would also expose President Mitterrand to criticism from key Francophone African leaders and opposition parties in France. In the meantime, the casualties and expense incurred so far are well within what most Frenchmen see as the costs that are necessary to maintain their position as a regional power in Africa.

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Habre's Problems: External Dimensions

Negotiating with Exiles. Habre continues to pursue reconciliation talks with scattered groups of opponents outside the country in an effort to convince the French that he is serious about seeking a broad political settlement. The US Embassy reports that over the last several months, a government delegation has held a series of informal talks in the Congo with mainly southern-based dissident groups (see annex) with the aim of convening another reconciliation roundtable.

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Habre faces serious obstacles, however, in negotiating an agreement with exiled factions. In exchange for their support, the dissidents demand that abuses by Habre's northern troops deployed in the south must be brought under control and that rebel leaders be awarded senior positions in Habre's government. Habre is under pressure, however, from fellow northerners who believe he has been too accommodating to rebel demands. Even if external groups rally to the government, we believe each side will remain deeply suspicious of the other.

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Although N'Djamena has agreed to Congo as a suitable site for negotiations with the dissidents, left-leaning Brazzaville's close ties to Libya and record of past support for Goukouni could undermine future talks. Congolese officials believe that reconciliation talks will fail as long as Habre insists that dissident leaders recognize him as Chad's sole legitimate leader, according to the US Embassy. The US Embassy notes also

Habre, and recognizes him as only the de facto head of state. Moreover, since Tripoli promised significant military and economic assistance to the Congo last fall, US Embassy officials have noted that the Libyan presence in Brazzaville has grown to at least 45 personnel, many of which we believe are there to undermine any possibility of an agreement between the dissidents and Habre.

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Regional Security Concerns. Habre's efforts to strengthen ties with neighboring states, to enhance security along Chad's borders and bolster his legitimacy, have had limited success. The US Embassy in Lagos reports that since seizing power last January, General Buhari's military regime in Nigeria takes a more jaundiced view of Habre than did the previous civilian government.

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the Nigerians have repeatedly held up at the border vital fuel supplies destined for Chad and continue to deny Chad's request to establish a consulate in Maiduguri, where the Chadians allege that the Libyans have set up a base for subversive actions against Chad. Moreover, the Nigerian military is building up its forces in the disputed Lake Chad area and reportedly no longer participates in joint patrols with Chadian units set up after brief clashes between the two states in the area last year.

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Despite public support for N'Djamena by the pro-Western Central African Republic, the fragile Kolingba regime has been unable to curb Libyan-supported Chadian dissident activity on its territory designed to subvert Habre. According to the US Embassy, Libyan supplies destined for Chadian dissidents operating across the porous border with southern Chad were air-dropped into northern CAR last fall. US Embassy officials also suspect that the bombs that destroyed the French airliner at N'Djamena airport last March were planted on the aircraft in Bangui, by two Libyans who were spotted leaving the flight area. Moreover, despite mounting evidence of Libyan subversion against Bangui itself, President Kolingba is reluctant to break ties with Tripoli for fear of provoking stepped-up Libyan subversion.

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We believe Habre fears that Cameroon, following an abortive coup last month by disgruntled northern Muslims, is a less stable neighbor. Even before the coup attempt, Habre complained [redacted] that Libyan-backed Chadian rebels operated freely in northern Cameroon despite Yaounde's efforts to patrol the area.

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Moreover, according to press reports, an anonymous caller in Douala claimed responsibility for the bombing of the French airliner in N'Djamena last March on behalf of a heretofore unknown Chadian dissident group. The US Embassy reports that Habre plans to visit Cameroon in the next several months, probably to urge greater Cameroonian vigilance in the border area.

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Habre's Domestic Challenges

Military Holding Action. In answer to the threat in the north from militarily superior Libyan forces, Habre has deployed about 1,200 of his best troops along the western axis up to Koro Toro and some 1,000 in the east as far north as Oum Chalouba (see map) to try to guard against rebel attacks or infiltration south to more populous areas. Habre's forces patrol and mine roads along the 16th parallel, but lack arms, supplies, vehicles, and French air cover for major offensive operations. The ability last January of some 200 dissidents to overrun a government garrison at Ziguey--some 90 miles below the 16th parallel--demonstrated N'Djamena's difficulty in preventing raids deep into government territory.

in early April a small rebel column penetrated government defenses near Oum Chalouba below the 16th parallel as it probed for weak points in the French and government defensive line. Moreover, Habre's own efforts to harass dissident troops with small-scale hit and run operations have had only limited success, according to US Embassy reporting.

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Combating Dissident Activity. In the south and east, Habre continues to work toward an accommodation with dissident factions, while trying to slow rebel infiltration and Libyan resupply efforts southward. Although several large groups of southern dissidents have rallied to the government since talks began last year, the situation remains fragile. In our view, the loyalty of the ralliers--estimated to total over 1,400 well-armed men--depends on Habre's ability to continue to meet their demands, which include full pay as newly integrated members of the military, retention of personal weapons, and free circulation throughout the country.

Hostilities between holdout rebel groups and Habre's northern army continue to erupt, threatening to undermine public confidence in Habre's ability to restore peace to the country.

continued abuses of the local population by some 3,000 government troops stationed in the south and east also lend legitimacy to the rebels' claim that they are protecting the people from Habre's army. The US Embassy in N'Djamena reports that Habre soon plans to visit the major towns in the south and east for the first time since his takeover in 1982 in hopes of encouraging more rebels to rally and to enhance his image as the arbiter of the regions' welfare.

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Building an Effective Army. The US Embassy in N'Djamena reports that the 8,000 to 10,000-man Chadian army will be unable to defend itself

against Libyan-sponsored aggression for the foreseeable future despite a reorganization and training programs initiated last year. The army is plagued by ethnic and regional rivalries, lack of discipline, shortages of equipment, and inability to maintain its equipment. According to the US Embassy, command authority emanates from personal loyalties, traditional desert warfare is ill-adapted to modern weapons, and Habre's troops lack the technical expertise to effectively use sophisticated weaponry. Moreover, soldiers are on half-pay due to government austerity measures, and the meager defense budget will not allow for the purchase of any major military equipment or services. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, with French assistance Habre has begun an extensive effort to organize, equip, and train an army better capable of defending Chadian territory. The US Embassy reports that the French are developing institutions to provide training in unit formation and basic soldier skills as well as specialized maintenance and logistic courses. [redacted]

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Economic Reconstruction. The Habre regime has had some success in reviving the war-disrupted economy, according to the US Embassy. The lull in the civil war, favorable weather conditions in the south, and the perseverance of southern farmers despite rebel attacks on storage areas and transportation routes, allowed the production of a record cotton crop this year. Cotton production reached 140,000 metric tons, and sales of this principal export could earn more than \$100 million if all the crop can reach foreign markets. Moreover, a rebound in small-scale commercial activities has been spurred by consumer demand for imports created by the presence of French troops. Increased local trade in N'Djamena is also attracting Chadians from rural areas, further increasing the demand for basic goods and services. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, the government still needs large infusions of foreign assistance to pay for essential imports, the salaries of civil servants and soldiers, essential government services, and continued economic reconstruction. Moreover, persistent drought in central and northern Chad, coupled with dislocation brought on by the civil war, have caused a sharp decline in food production and increased dependence on international food assistance. [redacted]

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Neither peace nor foreign help will bring quick improvement for the economy, according to US Embassy economic experts. Slow but substantial progress in cotton production, could be made, however, by greater availability of seeds, fertilizers, and extension services. Changes in procedures for the purchase and marketing of cotton--now the responsibility of a mismanaged, government-owned enterprise--would also

increase output. Besides increasing cotton yields, the US Embassy reports that Habre's other priorities include rebuilding the cattle industry, which has been devastated by years of drought, and expanding the production and distribution of electric power, critical to the improvement of the country's rudimentary manufacturing base. [redacted]

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Chad's most pressing need is an improved transportation network, particularly an all-weather road system to the north and east. The extension of roads would open the interior to livestock raising and expand the market for local industries. Better linkage with long-neglected areas also would be an important element in the long process toward developing a sense of unity among Chad's disparate ethnic and tribal groups. [redacted]

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Outlook

In our judgment, the Habre regime is critically dependent on continued French military and political backing to ensure its survival. Although government forces can probably cope with a limited surge in Libyan-supported dissidence in the south and east, they would be hard pressed to repel a direct Libyan incursion in the north without French support or to contain strong dissidence on two fronts. Moreover, Habre is overwhelmingly dependent on Paris to supply military equipment and supplies, training, and support informing an integrated national army. [redacted]

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In our estimate, barring a withdrawal of French support the Habre regime probably will continue to make halting steps toward national reconstruction and reconciliation as long as the lull in major fighting continues. The government will probably continue, at French urging, to lay the groundwork for accommodation with dissident factions both inside and outside the country, in hopes of restoring domestic calm and broadening the regime's base of support. As long as Habre is able to hold the Libyans at bay, the stronger his position will become as a legitimate leader around whom the majority of Chadians favoring national recovery and independence can rally. [redacted]

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The present status quo in Chad that works in Habre's favor could be broken by:

- Libyan terrorist tactics against French diplomatic and military personnel on a scale that would cause French public opinion to swing against a continued activist role in Chad by the Mitterrand government.
- Habre's death or assassination, which would remove the most capable and forceful anti-Libyan leader presently available on the scene.

-- The emergence of a "third force" compromise figure as an alternative to both Habre and Goukouni that might tempt the French to seek a face-saving diplomatic settlement with Libya.

In the meantime, we believe Tripoli will continue to work to undercut French resolve to support Habre by trying to stir increased terrorism and guerrilla attacks by Chadian dissidents. We expect Libya to redouble efforts to foil or manipulate to its advantage Habre's efforts to promote diplomatic reconciliation with as many internal and external Chadian groups as are willing to do so. Qadhafi appears to believe he can wait out the French in Chad and keep enough pressure on Habre to frustrate meaningful reconciliation and reconstruction.

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ANNEXMajor Southern Chadian Dissident Groups in Exile

<u>Group</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Leadership</u>	<u>Background</u>
Revolutionary People's Movement (MRP)	Brazzaville	Wadal Abedel Kader Kamougue (founder/also vice president of the GUNT-- The Libyan-backed transitional government of National Unity Headed by Chadian dissident leader Goukouni.)	Founded in December 83 and composed of mostly southern Chadian students, who depend on Libyan stipends to finance their education. Demand that negotiations be held under auspices of the OAU.
Permanent Committee of the South (CPS)	Brazzaville	Ngarnayal Moailemdana	Group broke with former southern leader Kamougue in late 1983 over accusations that he negotiate with Habre, but demands that northern troops deployed in the south be better disciplined and that committee leaders be given government posts.
Chadian Action Committee for Unity and Socialism (ACTUS)	Paris	Moungar Fidele	Founded in 1981 in southern Chad. Received financial assistance from French Communist Party. After meeting with government representatives in March 1983, group agreed to negotiate with Habre's regime.
Democratic Union for Progress (PDU)	Paris	Fnu Jario	Jario indicated during a meeting with government representative last March that Union for the group would negotiate with N'Djamena if Habre were replaced by southerner Abdoulaye Lamana or Acheik Ibn Oumar (GUNT Defense Minister and leader of one of its factions--the CDR or Democratic Revolutionary Council.)
Democratic Alliance (AD)	Paris	Abdoulaye Lamana	Demand that Habre be replaced before the group will negotiate.

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